

## CHARLES PAGE

A MAN—A DREAM—AN OPPORTUNITY

*By Mrs. Walter Wood\**

Standing on a granite pedestal in the picturesque triangle in the center of Sand Springs is a bronze figure of a man at whose feet near the base stand figures of women and children with faces upturned toward the benevolent face of the man above them, the man whose features are as life-like as the sculptor, Lorado Taft, could make them. The statue represents Charles Page, benefactor of widows and orphans. Across the street from the monument is the Page Memorial Library, a gift from Mrs. Page. On a wall here hangs a portrait of Charles Page; in the Home over the great mantel is a rich painting of him; in the local bank and other institutions he founded are pictures of him, yet neither sculptor nor artist have best preserved in their works the memory of Charles Page. Rather, it is preserved in the abundant life of the many children in the Home, one generation of them after another, living harmoniously amid home-like splendor, in the spirit of contentment among widowed mothers and their children, living in comfort and security in attractive cottages in the Widow's Colony; and in the Sand Springs industries where it has been demonstrated that industry and labor can go hand in hand for the good of each. These are the best memorials to Charles Page.

Born on June 2, 1860, Charles Page lived his first eleven years on a Wisconsin farm with his parents, James William Page and Mary Ann Gottry Page, and from their life, under pioneering conditions, he learned of thrift and careful management. From parental precept and example, he learned of honor and gratification in sharing with worthy, needy fellow men whatever comforts of life he possessed. The father of Charles Page, a staunch Scot and Presbyterian, managed to provide from his own farm enough food and to spare, supporting five families of women and children whose husbands and fathers were in the Union Army, when they might otherwise have been in destitute condition. The mother of Charles Page always helped with a neighborly hand in case of illness, birth or death, and her old album was filled with daguerreotypes of herself and infants she had assisted into the world. Her own infant and

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last son, Edwin, born during the Civil War, was named by her eldest son, William, for a tent-mate of his. William was stationed at Ft. Gibson, Cherokee Nation. Station Commander was Colonel Dodge, who afterward became first Governor of Wisconsin. William Page's Captain was DeWitt Brown whose wife, Frances, was a younger sister of the Page children's mother. On their way back to camp one day while riding along single file "at ease," this contingent of troops was fired upon by bushwhackers who lurked along the way. A skirmish followed with two Union men killed. William Page, fatally wounded, rode back to meet the hospital unit drawing up the rear. "Aunt Fannie," he cried, "I've been shot!" then added, "But I got the man that shot me." "Aunt Fannie" Brown was a nurse and went through the war with the Hospital Corps serving wherever her husband was detailed. William Page lived twelve hours after being shot. He was buried at Ft. Gibson. Frances Brown lived to visit her nephew, Charles Page, at Tulsa in 1908. She died while there and was buried in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

When Charles Page was eleven years old his father died, in 1871. Reconstruction was still trying the strength of adults and young Charles shouldered burdens beyond his years, in his zeal to lessen burdens borne by his widowed mother. Leaving the small farm near Arnett, the mother moved her family to Stephen's Point, a pioneer town fourteen miles distant.

Of her eight children only two were then at home with her, Charles and Edwin A., later known simply as "Ed." Fluent in the languages of her German-French parents who emigrated from Alsace when she was eight, speaking equally well the language of her adoption, Charles Page's mother desired for her children the best of whatever education the locality afforded. She even kept as boarder in her home the school's one teacher, Miss Marcia Morrison. At an early age, Charles was forced to forsake his studies in school to help his mother after his father's death, and resumed them again in early adult life when he studied under a private tutor. Grasping with force the essentials of learning, Charles Page was able later to cope successfully with men of best trained minds and ability.

Notwithstanding his deep and tender devotion to his mother, Charles Page was compelled to leave home at an early age to earn more money. Following the example of the *Man* who for all time and eternity must be above all men, and who, at the tender age of twelve years, announced to his mother, "I must be about My Father's business," young Charles, urged by an irresistible force within him, must begin working and living and growing into what he was to become. Work held

a challenge for him. Away from home, his first job was with the old Wisconsin Railroad as "callboy," with the duty of awakening the "next shift" by pounding on the door and announcing "Trains delayed" or "Trains on time." And this task was performed with zest. In his late teens, he was Police Chief in a small Wisconsin town. Again as a member of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, he was tracking down hunted men, following one much-sought man even to the Pacific coast. From such experiences he gained a deepened insight into the trials and troubles of "down and out" persons which helped to form into resolution his long-time inclination to be of help to others. He quit the detective force and henceforth, his fiercest struggle was with the forces of nature rather than with man.

Engaging in logging in northern states, he helped hew down great and tall timbers and among other men of the camp drove teams of oxen dragging the heavy logs to the water's edge where they were floated down the Mississippi and sold to saw mills at St. Louis. A venture in mining in Washington and British Columbia netted sufficient funds to invest in real estate in Denver and other cities. Then the Nation's financial crash in 1893 caused him to widen his undertakings.

Charles Page had sat sorrowfully at the bedside of his dying mother in March 1891. With bowed heart he had gone away after the funeral to throw himself even more intensely into whatever task he undertook. The elemental environs of the Northwest challenged still. Charles Page after his grief in the loss of his mother began again.

Among his long time acquaintances he is described as being "at least six feet tall, weighing 200 pounds or more, having broad shoulders, developed muscles, head and body well developed, black hair, heavy black eyebrows, black mustache, pleasant smile and voice, could be stern and positive when necessary." Again those associated with him say, "He figured in his head—kept records largely in his mind," and "He kept an open mind and information gravitated toward him. He seemed to know things without having to learn them, yet he was always learning." After he had become a successful oil man, had established a city, a perpetual Home for children, a Colony for poor widows, was recognized at home and abroad as an outstanding philanthropist and was honored and adored by the many he had benefitted most, even then, there was no formality in approaching him. He listened to everyone. A poor widow or a little child—all could speak their mind. And "He remembered names of all children of the Home."

In 1905, Charles Page came to Indian Territory and continued a long search for oil. In the Territory and Oklahoma, he

encountered failures with intermittent successes. He drilled the first well in what later became the Greater Seminole fields. But this was not his real success.

While living in Tulsa during the Panic of 1907, Charles Page met a young Salvation Army Captain, B. F. Breeding. From him he learned the whereabouts of many persons in desperate need. Page one day approached Captain Breeding and Breeding recalls his greeting:

Cap, I want to help you. I have a friend down on First Street who runs a rooming house for men. It has thirty beds. Go to him and engage all beds for transient men who are broke, and arrange with the restaurant next door for supper and breakfast. With two meals and a night's lodging send them on their way. If you find a needy family on account of sickness or unemployment, purchase groceries. Come to me each day for a check to pay the bills. For the weekend, come on Monday. If it is ten dollars or a hundred, pay it every day.

Sometimes the sum was a hundred dollars or more and it was always paid says Breeding, who explains, "Mr. Page never robbed people of their initiative. In helping them he was careful to leave something for them to do for themselves. The goal set for them was self-support and independence."

By act of Congress May 27, 1908, removal of restrictions from much Indian Land permitted purchase, with County Court approval, but an act which incidentally pointed a way for Charles Page to begin at last the realization of a life-time dream. He could purchase land and build his dream Home for children, and could provide homes for destitute widows and their children.

Mr. Page said to Captain Breeding in early 1908: "Cap, I'm buying a farm. I'm going to use it for the benefit of the human race. This farm has springs which afford an abundant supply of pure water. It is covered with oak, walnut, hickory and pecan timber and plenty of stone less than a mile away. I'm going to do good with it."

"He pictured to me," says Captain Breeding, "the purchase of additional land for town and factory sites, and for a park and lake. Also, a big farm with herds of livestock, the profits of all to be used for widows and orphans and the unfortunate whoever they might be."

After purchasing the land and hiring men to go with teams of oxen into the so-called "impenetrable wilderness of tangled briars and undergrowth, over impassable sand hills," to clear some of it and set up tents, Charles Page then invited his friend and co-worker in charitableness, Captain Breeding, to come and take charge of the future Sand Springs Home. Perhaps neither guessed that Captain Breeding would superintend the Home

through forty consecutive years while generations of children would come and go. The first occupants of the new (tent) Home were a widow Nolen and her two young sons. She died of tuberculosis soon afterward and her sons lived in the Home to their maturity. Others were soon added to the small number. Then on May 20, 1909, twenty children were brought over from the failing Cross and Anchor home for Children in Tulsa. On that first evening after the arrival of these children, Captain Breeding reminisces: "Mr. Page drove out in a buckboard; no car could be driven out at that time. He stayed until nine o'clock that night. From the spring, up through the row of cottages and tents he, with the children, paraded and sang 'Pretty Red Wing' and other popular songs of the time."

Under Charles Page's guidance, the atmosphere of the Home was as nearly like a real home as possible. On his frequent visits the children met him with a spontaneous burst of affection, equalled on other occasions only by their greeting for Captain Breeding.

From almost the beginning it was the custom of Mrs. Page and their daughter Mary, to accompany her husband on his visits to the Home, sharing equal interest with him. She was a beautiful soul and was an inspiration to the writer here. Mary, now Mrs. Calder Seibels, has one son, John Page Seibels.

Gradually the permanent structures of Home and Colony took shape. In 1910, a dormitory accommodating fifty children was completed and on Christmas Day, 1918, the new large and beautiful Home as it stands today, was dedicated. A party was held and food was served from twelve o'clock noon to eight o'clock evening including bear, buffalo, venison, opossum, rabbit, squirrel, turkey, duck, goose, and meat courses. Hundreds of guests, employees, friends, relatives, and Home children shared in the celebration. Always on Christmas there is a great tree loaded with gifts for the children and a program suited to the day.

Children living in the Home and Colony attend Sand Springs public schools, and churches of their choice. Higher education is provided for them, and those wishing to enter special training may do so. Some have reached a high rank in music and other specialized fields.

The Sand Springs Home Interests, incorporated in 1912, under laws of Oklahoma for charitable purposes, has authority to carry on business and own property. It is controlled by a five member Board of Directors, Home Trustees. Charles Page was president of the board and he selected members who should become trustees after his death, to serve throughout their lifetime, and he provided that after those named by himself should die,

their successors were to be appointed by the Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Grand Lodge A. F. & A. M. of Oklahoma.<sup>1</sup>

Charles Page always wanted his relatives near at hand. He brought many of them to Sand Springs to live near him and provided prominent places at the Home for his younger brother, "Ed" Page, and his nephew, E. M. Monsell, both now deceased. They were once members of his appointed Board of Trustees.

To support the Home and Widows' Colony, Mr. Page established the Sand Springs Railroad between Tulsa and Sand Springs with fair rates for freight and he encouraged the establishment of industries, providing low rental and low charge for water, natural gas, and electricity. Among the early remaining industries in Sand Springs, are the cotton mill, box factory, steel mill, Kerr Glass factory and others. The Sand Springs townsite was organized and the city platted in 1911. Charles Page made provisions for churches, schools and a library; established a state bank, greenhouse, and warehouses. He provided water at Shell Lake for both Sand Springs and Tulsa as well as Sand Springs park and lake for recreational purposes.

Two days after Christmas of 1926, Charles Page died. Children who were in the Home during his lifetime mourn his death to this day. He lies in a vault in Woodland Cemetery at Sand Springs, and the Home children shower the opening with flowers each Memorial Day. Many friends stand with bowed head at his tomb remembering him as one who loved his fellow man.

Judge Paul Pinkerton, his attorney, close associate, friend, and fellow churchman recalls some of Page's favorite mottos: "Look out of a window up at the hills and you will get hunches. Try to analyze these hunches and *Think Right*; Light a candle in your mind and that brings about an 'Inner Light' to solve the problem."

Charles Page became a member of the Presbyterian Church, to which he contributed liberally. Judge Pinkerton, expressing deepest esteem, relates:

Mr. Page was a man of strongest faith. One day he was riding with me in a car returning from Tulsa, where we had been together on some business. As we were passing the Indian Springs near the Greenhouse I remarked to Mr. Page that he had used great judgment in establishing Sand Springs on its present wooded location among the small hills rather than the low land south of the Katy Tracks and west of Lake Station which overflowed at times. Mr. Page at once explained: "I did not do it. Sand Springs is 'God's Town.'"

<sup>1</sup>The present board is composed of Board President, Paul E. Estill, accountant for the Home since 1922; J. S. Babbitt, President of the Sand Springs Railway; H. C. Jones, appointed by the Grand Master and was formerly Collector of Internal Revenue; E. J. Doerner, Tulsa attorney of the firm of Doerner, Rinehart & Stuart; S. Neal Johnson, prominent masonic worker, appointed by the Grand Master. Judge Paul Pinkerton, a local attorney, has served as attorney for Sand Springs Home since 1918.